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Prime Minister's schedule, October 22

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
October 23, 2008

08:33

Attended an emergency drill related to nuclear energy at the Kantei.

10:30

Met government spokesman Ogawa.

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11:06

Met LDP Regional Revitalization Committee Chairman Noda and Director Ishida, with Special Advisor Yamaguchi present.

12:08

Handed a credential to the LDP candidate for the Tochigi gubernatorial election at party headquarters, with Secretary General Hosoda and Election Strategy Council Chairman Koga, and others present. Posed for a photo with the new heads of Lower House single-seat constituencies' branch offices. Later, posed for photos and videos for publicity campaign, with Public Relations Office Head Furuya present. Joined by Public Relations Office Acting Head Seko.

13:17

Met Furuya and Koga.

13:54

Met at the Kantei with participants in the peace-building conference on Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including Israeli Interior Minister Sheetrit and PLO chief negotiator Erekat.

14:29

Met Foreign Ministry's Deputy Press Secretary Taniguchi.

15:08

Met METI Vice Minister Mochizuki and Resources and Energy Agency Director General Ishida. Followed by incoming and outgoing Supreme Court justice Takeuchi and Tsuno. Later, met Upper House member Takao Fujii.

16:13

Met Defense Ministry's Defense Policy Bureau Director General Takamizawa, Defense Intelligence Headquarters Chief Hokazono.

17:32

Met Indian Prime Minister Singh.

18:54

Attended a ceremony to sign a joint statement.

19:10

Held a joint press conference. Later, hosted a dinner party for Singh.

21:39

Returned to his private residence in Kamiyama-cho.

4) U.S. sounds out Australia, other countries on fuel oil for N. Korea

ASAHI (Page 9) (Full)
October 23, 2008

Countries participating in the six-party talks over North Korea's nuclear development programs are going to provide North Korea with energy aid worth one million tons of fuel oil in return for disabling its Yongbyon nuclear facility, and Japan's portion in this energy aid is 200,000 tons. In this regard, the United States has asked Australia and other countries to take on that amount of energy aid, according to Japanese government officials.

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Japan takes the position that it cannot take part in energy aid as long as there is no progress on the issue of Japanese nationals abducted to North Korea. Meanwhile, the United States and North Korea have now reached an agreement on a framework for verifying North Korea's nuclear declaration. In response, the U.S. government wants to have the six-party talks get going again and also wants to have prospects for completing energy aid to North Korea even by asking other countries. In the meantime, the six parties' chief delegates are expected to meet shortly. On that occasion, it seems that the U.S. government does not want to let North Korea take advantage of anything, according to a senior official of the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

In addition to Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia are also being talked about as energy providers. This matter is expected to be discussed in the next round of talks. Japan will basically accept the outcome there. "The question is which country will take on the burden," a senior official of the Foreign Ministry said. "That's a matter to be considered by the four countries (excluding Japan and North Korea)," the official added.

Australia and other countries are presumably aiming to explore the possibility of participating in the six-party talks in the future with their involvement in energy aid to North Korea.

5) Plan for another country to take over share of Japan's energy aid to North Korea: What effect will this have on abduction issue?

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
October 23, 2008

The U.S. government is looking into the possibility of asking several countries, including Australia, to take over Japan's economic and energy aid to North Korea that Japan has put off, citing the unresolved abduction issue as the reason. The Japanese government has been urging North Korea to address the issue in a forward-looking manner, using aid as a bargaining chip. But views now spreading in government circles are more complex. Some officials now take the view that one of the means to facilitate the abduction issue has disappeared, while others think that there will be no impact.

Asked by reporters about a possible impact of other countries taking over Japan's aid, Prime Minister Aso on October 22 replied at the Kantei: "The U.S. in particular fully understands the abduction issue. The aid assumption issue will neither weaken nor strengthen Japan's position. It has nothing to do with the matter."

It was decided at the six-party talks that North Korea should be given 950,000 tons of heavy oil aid in return for disabling its nuclear facilities. Japan's share is supposed to be 200,000 tons (approximately 17 billion yen). However, it has taken a stance of not providing such aid, citing as the reason the lack of progress on the abduction front. Tokyo has been using energy aid as a tool to move the abduction issue forward to find a breakthrough. It had not assumed that non-six-party-talks-member nations, such as Australia, would assume Japan's role.

As such, some take the view that there is a possibility of Japan's influence in the six-party talks would weaken due to its thin presence, as one government source said. Yukihiisa Fajita of the DPJ during the question-and-answer in the Upper House on the 22nd lashed

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out at the government, "If that is true, it is a major defeat for Japanese diplomacy."

6) Japanese, Indian leaders pledge to accelerate EPA negotiations

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)
October 23, 2008

Prime Minister Aso and his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh agreed in their meeting at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday on the need for the two countries to speed up negotiations to conclude an economic partnership agreement (EPA) at an early date to liberalize trade in goods and services. The two leaders also pledged to build a comprehensive framework to promote bilateral security cooperation. They signed a joint declaration that includes measures to promote defense exchanges to ensure vessels' safe navigation in the Indian Ocean.

Aso said in a press briefing after the meeting: "It is a natural course for the two countries to further deepen economic ties," and he indicated the importance of Japan and India concluding an EPA at an early date.

But on measures to simplify the procedures to authorize pharmaceuticals and to abolish tariffs on auto parts, both sides' views differ widely. Given this, the joint statement on advancing the Japan-India strategic global partnership just notes: "We welcome substantial progress" in the negotiations.

The two leaders also signed a joint declaration on security cooperation. This is the second case for Japan to express a plan to build a comprehensive framework in the security area with other countries than the U.S., following the declaration signed with Australia.

Asked in the press conference about cooperation between Japan and India, following the effectuation of the U.S.-India nuclear pact, Aso stated: "I hope India will implement the accord properly, including the continuation of its moratorium on conducting nuclear tests." Singh responded: "We would like to move forward at a pace that will make the Japanese people feel assured."

The joint statement also refers to global warming. India has opposed the Group of Eight (G-8) countries' call on every country to share the long-term goal of halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Softening its stance, India noted in the statement that it will "give heed" to the goal.

7) Japan-India summit reflect Aso's value-based diplomacy

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
October 23, 2008

The Japan-India summit on October 22 was Prime Minister Aso's first full-fledged summit. He advocates promoting cooperation with countries with which Japan shares such values as democracy and a market economy. This policy is aimed at solidifying Japan's influence in Asia. How he is going to build relations with China, which is alert to strengthened Japan-India relations on the security front, is drawing attention.

Aso underscored at a joint press conference on the 22nd, "I want to

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press ahead with cooperation with India for the sake of peace and stability in the region. Our cooperation is not targeting China."

Aso met with Australian Prime Minister Rudd on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September. The talks with Prime Minister Singh highlighted his attaching importance to a framework of Japan, the U.S., Australia and India as the main pillar of his value-based diplomacy. A Japan-China summit is set for the 24th. What response China will make is worthy of attention.

Aso is also devoting his energy to strengthening economic relations with India. His aim is to further expand relations with India by accelerating Japanese companies' advance and investment into the nation through assistance to India's efforts to consolidate infrastructure. The key element of that policy is the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.

The plan is to connect New Delhi and Mumbai with a high-speed cargo railway system stretching 1,500 kilometers. The estimated project cost is more than 10 trillion yen. The two leaders confirmed the promotion of the initiative, including the establishment of a joint fund. They also agreed to aim to reach an agreement to sign an economic partnership agreement (EPA) intended to liberalize trade in goods and services.

8) Japan-India summit held; Aso wants to display own diplomatic identity

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
October 23, 2008

Prime Minister Taro Aso's meeting yesterday with India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the first full-fledged event for Aso's Asia diplomacy since he assumed office. Looming in the background is a strategy to upgrade both Japan's relations with India as well as those with the United States and Australia, Japan's allies, in order to deal with the rise of China. The strategy overlaps with his arc-of-freedom-and-prosperity policy course. Prime Minister Aso is aiming to display his own political identity in Asia diplomacy, as well.

What makes this meeting unique is that Japan and India issued a joint security declaration -- something Japan has adopted only with the United States and Australia in the past. Effectively designed to define India as a security-cooperation partner following the United States and Australia, the joint declaration appears to reflect Prime Minister Aso's strong wishes.

The two countries envisage cooperation in such areas as sea-lane security, including measures against piracy, terrorism, and major natural disasters. To crosscheck external strategies, the framework of diplomatic and defense dialogue will be expanded at the same time.

In a joint press conference after the meeting, Prime Minister Aso emphasized that security cooperation with India is not designed to target any third country. Prime Minister Singh, too, showed consideration to China, saying: "No third country must be sacrificed. That includes China." But such comments might be a reflection of the two leaders' feelings of alarm toward China.

During his tenure as foreign minister, Aso advocated the arc of

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freedom and prosperity to encourage the democratization of Asia. The idea was for Japan, the United States, Australia, and India to work in close cooperation in dealing with China which was gaining a strong voice as a major power. The idea fell through because it drew fire from China and also because the United States took a cautious view, according to a Foreign Ministry source.

Although Prime Minister Aso has not touched on this policy course since assuming office, there seems to be the same thinking beneath the move to accelerate security cooperation with India. As for relations with Australia, a Japan-Australia foreign and defense ministers' meeting (2 plus 2) is scheduled to take place before the end of the year to strengthen cooperation.

Meanwhile, Aso's basic policy toward China is to build strategically and mutually beneficial relations. More specifically, it is to strengthen bilateral relations through cooperation in fields of common interest, such as energy and the environment.

The prime minister is expected to hold a summit on Oct. 24 and hold

talks with Chinese leaders on the sidelines of the APEC forum to be held in late November. The government has also made an informal proposal of holding a Japan-China-South Korea summit in Japan in early December.

9) International conference on reconstruction assistance to Georgia announces 450 billion yen in aid: Japan to provide 20 billion yen

ASAHI (Page 9) (Full)
October 23, 2008

An international conference on reconstruction assistance to Georgia, which suffered damage in the military conflict with Russia in August, was held in Brussels on October 22. The meeting, hosted by the European Commission (EC) of the European Union (EU) and the World Bank, was joined by about 70 countries and international agencies. Participating countries announced a plan to disburse a total of approximately 4.5 billion dollars (approximately 450 billion yen).

Of the 4.5 billion, 2 billion dollars will be grant aid, and 2.5 billion dollars will be provided as loans -- yen loans worth about 200 million dollars (about 20 billion yen) by Japan, 1 billion dollars (about 100 billion yen) by the U.S., and 500 million euro (about 63.5 billion yen) by the EC. Reconstruction funds will be used for the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged in the battle, the protection of refugees and economic reconstruction aimed to lure foreign investment.

Russia, which has recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, was not invited on Georgia's wishes. Even the EU's monitoring mission cannot enter those two regions. There is reportedly no plan for the contributions to be directly used for them.

10) Aso announces continued assistance to Palestinian Authority

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
October 23, 2008

Prime Minister Aso met with Israeli Internal Affairs Minister Meir Sheetrit and Saeb Erekat, chief negotiator for the Palestine

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Liberation Organization (PLO), at his office yesterday. They are visiting Japan to attend a peace-building conference on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to be hosted by the Japanese government.

Referring to the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity," an initiative proposed by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi as measures to support the Palestinian Authority, Aso announced Japan's continued assistance to the Palestinian people, saying: "If we can link desires for the future and economic prosperity, it would greatly contribute to bringing about peace."

11) Foreign Ministry protests to Shukan Asahi over its article, saying it contradicts the facts

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
October 23, 2008

Shukan Asahi, a weekly magazine published by Asahi Shimbun Co. that went on sale on Oct. 21, carried an article titled "Aso diplomacy has failed" by journalist Takashi Uesugi. Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Kazuo Kodama revealed in a press briefing yesterday that Press Division Director Koichi Mizushima had visited Asahi Shimbun Co., lodged a protest and demanded a correction to the article, saying that what is in the article conflicts with the facts. It is rare for the Foreign Ministry to lodge a protest against a weekly magazine article.

The article says that Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Akitaka Saiki furiously said, "Don't write fake articles," to MOFA reporters in an off-the-record session in connection with the U.S. delisting of North Korea as a state sponsor

of terrorism. Press Secretary Kodama said: "Both the contents and the description that (Saiki) was infuriated contradict the facts. The article also quotes a senior Foreign Ministry official as saying, "A cabinet minister as incompetent as Foreign Minister Nakasone is rare." Touching on this description, Kodama also said: "Mr. Uesugi's interview with a senior Foreign Ministry official has not been confirmed, and the article's authenticity is questionable. The responsibility of Shukan Asahi that carried the article is grave."

Shukan Asahi has released its Editor-in-chief Kazuomi Yamaguchi's comment: "We would like to consider a future response upon holding talks with Mr. Takashi Uesugi who wrote the article."

12) Interim report: Petty officer's one-on-15 exercise unnecessary

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Full)
October 23, 2008

A petty officer 3rd class of the Maritime Self-Defense Force, who had enrolled in the preparatory course for the MSDF Special Boarding Unit, died after being fatally injured in a martial arts-style exercise. In this regard, the Defense Ministry yesterday revealed an interim report issued by the MSDF accident investigation commission. The report concluded that there was no need to subject the 25-year-old petty officer, who was about to quit the preparatory course, to a one-on-15 martial art-style exercise and that the training was inappropriate.

However, the report failed to refer to the possibility that the incident was a group assault or a beating of the petty officer by

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instructors and his colleagues. The report mainly stipulated how the fatal incident occurred. The Defense Ministry said: "We avoided referring to the details, since the MSDF military police are separately investigating the incident."

According to the interim report, there was a one-on-15 martial art-style exercise in May toward another petty officer, and the 15 members possibly believed the exercise was an MSDF tradition bestowed upon enrollees who left the course early.

The dead man's training was drawn up by one of the 15 members and ordered by an instructor. The member planned to carry out an exercise on Sept. 9 since the dead man was to drop out on the 11th. "I heard him say he wanted to go through with it, but nobody could have said 'no' in that atmosphere," one of the 15 members was quoted as saying in the report. This suggests that nobody could say 'no' because of group psychology.

The commission analyzed the fatal incident from six aspects, including human and educational training sides. The report wrote that the training plan and management were inappropriate and it questioned whether the 15 members were capable of safely implementing a martial art-style exercise. The report also wrote that an investigation would be necessary as to whether the two instructors were qualified.

13) Defense Ministry to create new bureau

SANKEI (Page 2) (Abridged)
October 23, 2008

The Defense Ministry plans to set up a new bureau for defense buildup planning, officials said yesterday. The newly planned bureau is to be made up of Defense Ministry bureaucrats and Self-Defense Forces staff officers. The Defense Ministry's Planning and Programming Division, currently made up of civilian bureaucrats, and relevant sections in the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces' respective staff offices will be integrated for joint work. This is aimed to put together the three SDF branches' capabilities and select mainstay equipment for them. The Defense Ministry will for the first time have an internal bureau with a large number of SDF personnel. The ministry wants to set up the new bureau in 2010

and will incorporate this plan in its basic policy documentation to be worked out today for its reform.

The SDF's budget is spent mostly on its procurement of mainstay equipment, such as tanks and aircrafts on the front. The GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF staff offices have so far made their respective budget requests, which are to be coordinated within the Defense Ministry for internal approval. Each SDF staff office negotiates to secure a budget at the same level as the preceding fiscal year's budget, so there has been no change for over 10 years in the SDF's budget shares at 43 PERCENT to 44 PERCENT for the GSDF and 26 PERCENT to 28 PERCENT for each of the MSDF and the ASDF. This has been pointed out as a negative impact of something like bureaucratic sectionalism.

Given such circumstances, a report released in July by an advisory panel, which was set up at the prime minister's office to reform the Defense Ministry, suggested the need for the Defense Ministry to integrate its defense buildup planning sections so the SDF can appropriately distribute its troop strengths from the Defense

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Ministry's overall perspectives. The report, however, did not go so far as to refer to whether the new defense buildup planning office should be set up within the Defense Ministry or should be a special body that is highly independent like the Equipment Procurement and Construction Office. The GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF staff offices were first negative about the idea of integrating their defense buildup planning sections into an internal bureau of the Defense Ministry but later insisted on setting up a new internal bureau at the Defense Ministry. If the new section is set up as a special body, an internal bureau responsible for Diet replies could remain above it. The three SDF services therefore inclined to send their crackerjacks to an internal bureau so their respective views can be reflected.

14) Gov't mulls relief fund for overseas terror victims

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)
October 23, 2008

The government has decided to legislate relief measures for Japanese victims of terrorism overseas as well as those for crime victims at home, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura told a press conference yesterday. "Western countries already have a system and I have ordered this be studied immediately," Kawamura said. At his order, the Cabinet Office will work to study legislative measures.

Earlier in the day, Kawamura attended a plenary sitting of the House of Councillors, during which he referred to the possibility of enacting a special measures law for specific incidents. He was replying to a question asked by Yukihiro Fujita from the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto).

Under Japan's crime victims relief system, victims themselves will be paid if they are injured or left affected, and in case they died, payments will be made to their bereaved families. In July, the government raised its maximum payment to crime victims at home from about 18.5 million yen to about 39.74 million yen, as well as under the automobile third party liability insurance system. However, victims overseas have not been considered for payment.

15) Rebutting criticism of his posh nightlife, Prime Minister Aso says, "Hotel bars are cheap!"

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
October 23, 2008

When asked to comment on criticism of his frequent visits to exclusive restaurants and bars at night, Prime Minister Taro Aso told reporters yesterday: "I think hotels are cheap." He underscored that restaurants and bars in hotels were cheaper than first-class Japanese restaurants. He said: "You have distorted the facts by reporting as if I went to high-class Japanese restaurants every night. That's not true."

As of Oct. 21, Aso has gone at night to 32 restaurants and bars since taking office. Of the 32, 23 or more than 70 PERCENT are restaurants and bars in hotels. He said: "I believe meeting with a number of people at hotel bars is safe and cheap." According to official announcements, Aso was often accompanied by one or two persons, such as his secretaries or a deputy chief cabinet secretary. However, Aso's remarks yesterday indicated that he has secretly met with many people at one occasion.

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"If I go to a posh restaurant accompanied by some 30 newspaper reporters and police officers, the restaurant would say that my visit obstructs its business. What should I say?" He then pointed out: "Hotels do not make any complaints." He then said: "I won't change my style. I have paid the bills myself."

However, hotel bars are not that cheap because they charges extra fees, in addition to drinks. Aso said last night: "Don't you know that hotel bars are not that expensive?"

16) Shizuka Kamei criticizes DPJ's stance in Diet as too conciliatory

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
October 23, 2008

Shizuka Kamei, acting head of the People's New Party, insisted in a press conference yesterday that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) should take a confrontational stance in the Diet. He said: "The DPJ gives us the impression that it is willing to cooperate in everything if the prime minister decides to dissolve the House of Representatives."

SCHIEFFER